

SDOS Summer Blues outing 24th July 2025

Newtimber Hill



Across to Chanctonbury from Newtimber

Sixteen members met up with leader Terry and the two Tonys (Letchford and Benton) representing the upper echelons of our very friendly local group. Today birds were taking a back seat as we were focusing on the downland butterfly species on Newtimber Hill. We agreed to meet at the delightful Wildflower café for a pre-walk coffee and to gather everyone before the walk. Parking proved a little tricky as an event on at the National Trust HQ limited spaces. Eventually we managed to get everyone parked up and by 10am we were all ready to start the walk.



Mating Chalkhill Blues

We didn't have to go far as just a few meters from the café there is a bank of marjoram and wildflowers that attract a wide variety of butterflies, beetles and bees. We spent a while here, whilst it remained cloudy and grey overhead the sheltered bank was warm, and insect activity was high. We watched some pristine common blues, gatekeepers and the odd brown argus flittered and zig-zagged around but were not settling where viewable. Among the 'showier' butterflies were a couple of beautiful small tortoiseshells, a once common butterfly that now is sometimes hard to find. There were many others such as large and small white and small and Essex skippers. Overhead were several housemartins, also enjoying the insect activity!

Eventually we managed to move on to a small South facing slope and here the warmer aspect often produces a different suite of butterflies. On this occasion we came across our first downland specialist the chalkhill blue. This exquisite butterfly is larger than the common blue and has a milky hue rather than the mauve of the common blue. A second brood dingy skipper was another unusual find, enjoying the southern aspect. We also found a few wasp spiders, which are yellow banded as their name suggests, a very attractive species, which has become more common in recent years.



Brimstone

We continued to the open slopes of Newtimber Hill, we took a moment to appreciate the commanding views across the weald to Truleigh Hill, Chanctonbury Ring and along the cleft of the Devils Dyke and not least the species rich downland grassy hills in front of us, that provide the habitat for many of our iconic butterflies.



Small Tortoiseshell

The sun began to threaten to appear, but it remained stubbornly grey and on the open slopes the wind was a little keener. The butterflies however were still showing well with several chalkhill blues now flying and a dark green fritillary was a welcome bonus, now at the end of their flight season. Not to neglect the birds, a yellowhammer was enjoyed in full view on top of a near-by bush and a green woodpecker was seen hunting ants on the ground, before it flew off. We even had a mammal appear as a roe deer appeared out of the thickets and fled over the hill. The group by now had spread out so not everyone got to see the deer, but it was enjoyed by the leading group.



Brown Argus

As we started to drop down the slope onto the lower path we finally came across another of the target species, the silver spotted skipper. It was flighty and elusive but eventually everyone managed to get a reasonable sighting of this delightful butterfly. Another species that is faring well in the south of England and increasing its range. 'Gronking' calls alerted us to a pair of ravens flying by and we also had enjoyed a pair of kestrels swooping and hovering over the slopes and landing in the tall shrubs. We also came across a badger sett and associated scat to show it was still an active sett.



Dingy Skipper

We slowly made our way back down the slope and on to the lower path, enjoying many chalkhill and common blues, silver spotted skippers and others. A brief stop at the first little hill produced a matting pair of chalkhill blues, which showed the male female contrast perfectly. Tony also found and confirmed a brown argus. We paused again at the marjoram bank and again it threw up a few surprises with a lovely male brimstone and then quite unexpectedly a silver washed fritillary floated on by and stopped briefly before it continued back into the stand of trees, it was a great way to end a very enjoyable walk. We had encountered about twenty species of butterflies and a couple of downland species, maybe a little too early for the adonis blue, but they will be the focus of the next butterfly walk.



Wasp Spider

Species List

Butterflies:

Large white

Small white

Green-veined white

Brimstone

Small copper

Brown argus

Common blue

Chalkhill blue

Red admiral

Painted lady

Small tortoiseshell
Dark green fritillary
Silver washed fritillary
Gatekeeper
Wall
Meadow brown
Marbled white
Speckled wood
Small skipper
Essex skipper
Dingy skipper

Birds:

Kestrel
Green woodpecker
Raven
Yellow hammer
House martin

Mammals

Roe deer
Badger signs

Others:

Five-spot burnet moths
Blood-vein
Common wave moth
Mint moth (Pyrausta)sp
Red soldier beetle
Wasp spider

Longhorn beetle sp